

EXHIBIT R - DECLARATION 22



Abhijit Bagal <abebagal@gmail.com>

Defend California's proposed caste discrimination ban, following Seattle's historic victory!

Councilmember Kshama Sawant <kshama.sawant@seattle.gov>
Reply-To: Councilmember Kshama Sawant <kshama.sawant@seattle.gov>
To: abebagal@gmail.com

Sun, Jun 25, 2023 at 11:27 AM

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Dear friends,

Ever since it was introduced in March, California's proposed caste discrimination ban, known as SB403, has been under attack by right-wing Hindu fundamentalist organizations aligned with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his reactionary Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Now, as Democratic President Joe Biden gives a red-carpet welcome to the right-wing Modi, California's Democratic Party has openly and shamefully joined the pro-Modi, Hindu, right-wing effort to undermine the bill to ban caste discrimination and its crucial protections for caste-oppressed community members and working people.

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Sign the petition now! Tell the Democrats in the California
Legislature: Stand With the Caste-Oppressed, Not the
Modi-Aligned Hindu Right Wing! Pass the Ban on Caste
Discrimination (SB403) With No Watering Down!

I will be in the Bay Area today (Sunday, June 25) to speak at 12PM at the Roosevelt Community Center (901 East Santa Clara Street, San Jose, CA 95116), where we will discuss these developments and how we can build a powerful movement to combat right-wing attacks. If you aren't in the area, please join us on the [livestream](#)!

California's proposed bill to ban caste discrimination follows Seattle's historic February 21st victory, when our city became the first jurisdiction globally outside South Asia to win a ban on caste discrimination. If the California bill is passed without watering down or delays, it would be an extremely crucial victory, continuing the momentum set by Seattle's anti-caste movement, Socialist Alternative, and our socialist Council office.

On Wednesday, CA Assemblymembers Evan Low and Alex Lee blatantly came out in support of the Modi-aligned Hindu right wing. In a [public letter](#), Assemblymembers Low and Lee propose indefinitely stalling the legislation to ban caste discrimination, using the excuse that there is not enough data. Alternatively, they propose amending the bill to relegate "caste" as one part of "ancestry," a move that would underemphasize the serious nature of caste-based discrimination in the United States.

While the Democrats claim this is an effort to "strengthen the bill," these "proposals" are entirely in accordance with the demands of right-wing organizations like the Hindu American Foundation, who oppose all caste-based

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protections. In reality, all of this is an attempt to indefinitely stall and effectively kill the legislation.

In a demonstration of the U.S. imperialist “friend-shoring” agenda against the China-led bloc in the New Cold War, President Biden’s White House is currently hosting the reactionary Narendra Modi for an unprecedented “pomp-filled” state visit and “[star-studded gala dinner](#)”.

It’s no surprise, then, that California Democrats are likewise gearing up to undermine legislation to ban caste discrimination, which if won, would be an offensive victory against Modi’s Hindu fundamentalist regime that has overseen ratcheted-up attacks against oppressed-caste working people and the poor, and a fomenting of Islamophobia.

The main opponents of SB403, whom the Democrats are joining, are right-wing organizations like the Hindu American Foundation (HAF) and the Coalition of Hindus of North America (CoHNA). Both these organizations have agendas overlapping that of Modi and the BJP, and they have strongly supported the horrific anti-Muslim, anti-oppressed-caste, anti-poor citizenship laws that were attempted by the Modi regime.

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When our movement in Seattle was fighting for what would become the first ban on caste discrimination in the world outside South Asia, we faced strenuous opposition from these same groups. The most prominent

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organization opposing our ordinance, whose support the HAF and CoHNA celebrated, was the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), which is one of the most dangerous far right organizations in India linked with the Modi regime, and which according to the Human Rights Watch, was one of the three organizations most responsible for a 2002 killing of Muslims in the Western Indian state of Gujarat.

It is no surprise that these organizations dishonestly dispute the extent of the problem of caste discrimination. Their arguments, including that caste protections would be “divisive” and “discriminatory against Hindus” echo the right-wing talking points from Christian groups in the U.S. who filed lawsuits claiming that LGBTQ protections discriminated against their freedom of religion.

The change that Low and Lee are proposing was pulled directly from a long list of suggested amendments proposed by the Hindu American Foundation, which aimed to gut the bill entirely. Unfortunately, SB403’s sponsor, Democratic State Senator Aisha Wahab, buckled under pressure from the HAF and the right wing, and stripped several Whereas clauses in the original bill that describe the seriousness of caste discrimination. The HAF demanded that “caste” be replaced with “ancestry,” and when Wahab refused, the right wing found allies in Low and Lee instead.

Rather than fight the HAF with a movement of working people who support the bill, Wahab caved to the right wing. It is a lesson that when you buckle in the face of right-wing pressures, they come back demanding more, and it is never a strategy that pays off, if the goal is to win the maximum possible victories for oppressed community members and working people.

Wahab’s concessions have also opened the door to legitimize the right wing’s false talking points. Samir Kalra, managing director of the Hindu American

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Foundation, is now able to assert that the language they succeeded in getting Wahab to remove was "racist." Kalra said in a statement, "The amendments to SB 403 are a step in the right direction and remove some of the racist language about South Asians in the findings and declarations, but the fact that caste as a separate legal category continues to remain in the bill is highly problematic. The category of caste is neither facially neutral nor generally applicable to all Californians and thus, we believe, a violation of equal protection under the law."

In their letter, Low and Lee go on to say, "While anecdotal evidence and the lived experiences we have heard from activists are compelling, an official study is warranted." These are the same arguments that we heard from right-wing groups against our Seattle law, which some Democrats on the Seattle City Council also repeated.

The argument that caste discrimination doesn't exist to a significant extent in the U.S. simply does not hold water, given the statistical evidence from Equality Labs and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, along with the hundreds of oppressed-caste workers who have spoken out publicly. In an attempt to assert that caste-based discrimination does not exist in the United States, the right wing often claims that the Carnegie study invalidates the methodology of the Equality Labs survey. In reality, that same Carnegie study also found significant evidence of caste-based discrimination in the United States. The Carnegie study also acknowledged that the date may be under-reported.

Low and Lee also parrot the right-wing claim that studies like these have led to "divergent conclusions." **That both studies, using different methodologies, found significant caste-based discrimination, in fact demonstrates the reality and pervasiveness of caste discrimination in the United States.**

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Amending SB403 to add caste as a subcategory under existing "Ancestry" protections is in line with the assertions from groups like HAF and CoHNA that extending protections on the basis of caste is unnecessary because such protections are already covered by existing anti-discrimination policy. This is false. In reality, oppressed castes are a minority within a minority. They are doubly disadvantaged by virtue of being both racially marked and caste marked. Recognizing caste as a source of discrimination is an important step in protecting against this double disadvantage.

Protections specifically against caste-based discrimination are necessary because most often those who face it and those who perpetuate it are both likely to be South Asians (of a common racial and ethnic background), but of oppressed caste on the one hand and of dominant caste on the other. Winning our ordinance in Seattle forced the city's law to acknowledge that there are stark differences of caste power and status within the South Asian American community that carry over from a long history and a continuing situation of deep inequality in South Asia.

Assemblymember Alex Lee has taken at least \$542,000 from the Labor sector since he was elected to the legislature. That represents 38 percent of his total campaign contributions. His district, Milpitas, is home to over 17,000 Indian Americans, which accounts for nearly 32 percent of Milpitas population. Caste discrimination is a workers' rights issue, affecting the tech industry in particular—Lee's attacks on SB403 are a betrayal of his working-class constituents and the thousands of workers whose union dues funded his campaign.

Assemblymember Evan Low is the Chair of the California Asian American & Pacific Islander Legislative Caucus, and former Chair of the LGBT Caucus. This is a reminder that working people cannot rely on elected representatives or other leaders based on their identities—only an unapologetic allegiance to the

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interests of the working class can withstand the pressures to sell us out in the interests of the right wing or the billionaires. We need determined, anti-establishment fighters for the oppressed.

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The California AAPI Legislative Caucus has shamefully declined to take a position on SB403, which would provide crucial protections for thousands of caste-oppressed people in a state with one of the largest concentrations of South Asians in the U.S. **Contrast this betrayal with the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance speaking out in support of our ban on caste discrimination in Seattle.** All of the unions and labor organizations who have endorsed SB403 should put out statements against these unacceptable attempts to water it down, and worse, to kill it.

In Seattle, we were able to defeat the right wing and opposition from Democrats because we built a fighting, public movement that brought together hundreds and thousands of working people across caste, religion, background, and nationality. That is the kind of movement that will be necessary to fight against these and further attempts to undermine SB403 in California.

My office is part of a coalition of anti-caste and other community organizations, called America Against Caste Discrimination (AACD), that has been fighting for SB403 in California and to spread the anti-caste movement. We urgently need all anti-caste activists and working people who support SB403 to join us in fighting back to defend it.

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In solidarity,
Kshama

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Councilmember
Kshama Sawant

@cmkshama kshama.sawant@seattle.gov 206-684-8803

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07/28/2023 - [Workers Strike Back UPS Teamster Solidarity Meeting](#)

07/26/2023 - [PACK City Hall 8/1 for RENT CONTROL Final Vote!](#)

07/21/2023 - ["Labor Democrat" Andrew Lewis votes against rent control](#)

07/19/2023 - [Bust corporate landlord lies about rent control Fri 7/21 9:30AM](#)

07/18/2023 - [Democrats have said NOTHING yet to support our rent control bill](#)

07/14/2023 - [Email City Council Democrats to support rent control!](#)

07/10/2023 - [🗣️ Speak up Wednesday at the Rent Control Public Hearing!](#)

07/09/2023 - [👉 TODAY @ 3pm! 👉 Join PCC grocery workers for a rally & picket at the CD store!](#)

07/07/2023 - [Elisha's landlord jacked up rent from \\$900 to \\$1,500 for a 150-sq-ft micro-apartment!](#)

07/06/2023 - [Union members: Join the Rent Control Public Hearing on 7/12!](#)

06/27/2023 - [Join me as I introduce our RENT CONTROL bill Friday 9:30 am!](#)

06/25/2023 - [Defend California's proposed caste discrimination ban, following Seattle's historic victory!](#)

06/23/2023 - [A socialist plan to fight back against LGBTQ attacks](#)

06/06/2023 - [Tell Council NO to the Failed "War on Drugs"!](#)

06/02/2023 - [MON 6/5: Join PCC workers fighting for \\$25/hour!](#)

06/01/2023 - [Union members: Take action for rent control NOW](#)

05/23/2023 - [Have you experienced caste discrimination or Islamophobia?
Share your story!](#)

05/19/2023 - [Tell PCC: Grocery workers deserve \\$25/hour & a fair
contract!](#)

05/11/2023 - [Rent control NOW](#)

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Councilmember

Kshama Sawant

@cmkshama kshama.sawant@seattle.gov 206-684-8803

PUBLIC HEARING

SPEAK OUT ABOUT CASTE & ANTI-MUSLIM DISCRIMINATION

THURSDAY, SEPT. 21
6 PM @ SEATTLE CITY HALL



Councilmember

Kshama Sawant

@cmkshama kshama.sawant@seattle.gov 206-684-8803

Dear friends,

[Have you experienced discrimination on the basis of your caste or Muslim identity in the workplace, in housing, or at school in Washington state? Share your story.](#) *Your story will be kept strictly confidential and providing your name is optional.*

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Council office, and working people won the world's first [ban on caste discrimination](#) outside South Asia. This was a stunning victory against oppression, making [global headlines](#) and electrifying millions worldwide.

Now, Workers Strike Back, the independent movement that Socialist Alternative and I recently launched, is working alongside anti-caste activists to spread this victory around the country and internationally.

Seattle's new ordinance outlaws discrimination based on caste in both the public and private sectors, in employment, housing, and use of public places. But we know the courts under capitalism are not on the side of working people, so it's not enough just to have won this law—**now we need to fight to enforce it.**

We also want to help spread the victory, and win a ban on caste discrimination throughout Washington state!

And last but not least, we have heard that in addition to workers facing caste-based discrimination, **there are many workers who face discrimination for being Muslim.**

For all the above reasons, my Council office will host a [public hearing](#) at Seattle City Hall on Thursday, September 21 at 6pm for victims of discrimination based on caste or their Muslim identity to speak out. We want to bring attention to these experiences and use this hearing to further build a movement that can fight to enforce our hard-won protections in the courts.

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to help organize the fight against discrimination against oppressed-caste groups and Muslims.

[Share your story if you have experienced discrimination on the basis of your caste or Muslim identity in the workplace, in housing, or at school in Washington.](#) *Your story will be kept strictly confidential and providing your name is optional.*

Workers Strike Back, Socialist Alternative, and anti-caste activists have helped launch campaigns to ban caste discrimination in California and British Columbia, Canada—two regions with some of the largest South Asian communities in North America. Workers Strike Back is taking up this fight because **it is the responsibility of the labor movement to combat racism, sexism, homophobia and all forms of oppression**—including casteism—which are poisonous to working-class solidarity in the hands of the capitalist class.

Seattle's ban against caste discrimination represents a rare offensive victory for working people against the billionaire-backed, far-right Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government in India, and a model for how working people everywhere can fight the right wing. It's no coincidence that right-wing organizations like the Hindu American Foundation, which are aligned with the BJP, strenuously opposed the Seattle ban on caste discrimination.

The BJP has increasingly been using caste-based and Islamophobic attacks to divide working people with a dangerous far-right agenda and carry out the

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working class, including by attempting to privatize the agricultural sector in 2020 which provoked a historic general strike of farmers that defeated the effort. In December 2020, many of the Seattle-area activists who fought to win our caste discrimination ban also joined my office in winning a [City Council resolution](#) in solidarity with the farmers and labor movement in India.

Just this month, the BJP was dealt a blow in the South Indian state of Karnataka, where working-class voters turned out to vote in record numbers (over 73 percent) and forced the BJP out of power in the State Assembly, in a rejection of the BJP's divisive agenda of attacks on Muslims, Sikhs, oppressed castes and other marginalized communities. This was also a repudiation of the BJP's drive to lengthen the working day in Karnataka state from 8 to 12 hours, a shameful anti-worker policy they passed in February at the behest of major corporations like Apple that are trying to move their supply chains out of China in the context of the "[New Cold War](#)" between US and Chinese imperialism.

India's Congress Party, which defeated the BJP in Karnataka, ran on a platform of economic demands like monthly payments to struggling households and unemployed youth, a fixed amount of free electricity each month, and free bus travel for women across the state.

But India's working class cannot have illusions in the Congress Party, either. The rank and file of Karnataka's labor movement will need to fight to force the incoming Congress state government to fulfill their campaign promises, and to call for greater taxes on the wealthy. The Congress Party is among the multitude of parties with a decades-long track record of failing to stand up for the needs of the urban and rural Indian masses.

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And it shows that a majority of working people will support a political program of demands that addresses the needs of the working class and opposes chauvinism and bigotry.

Ultimately, the only way to defeat the right wing both in the United States and in India is to unite working people across ethnic, religious, racial and gender lines in a fighting mass movement—and use it to build a new party that will represent our needs and be accountable to us, not the bosses. We not only need movements to win crucial reforms like our ban on caste discrimination and our recent [\\$10 late rent fee cap](#), but also to enforce and defend these victories once they become law. **Under capitalism, the gains we make by organizing and fighting need to be defended in the same way.**

[I urge you to share your story and get involved in the fight against caste discrimination, Islamophobia and all forms of oppression that divide the working class.](#) And please join us for the [public hearing](#) on Thursday, September 21 at 6pm at Seattle City Hall! Workers Strike Back and my Council office are committed to taking the fight forward and spreading our victory near and far.

In solidarity,
Kshama Sawant

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